

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1730

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAIR, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES EQUIPMENT PURCHASE

REF: DAMASCUS 1628

1. DURING RECENT VISIT OF U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE VICE CHAIRMAN MORRISON, ECON OFFICER TOLD BY PROMINENT BUSINESSMEN WITH SEEMINGLY GOOD CONNECTIONS THAT SYRIAN GOVT HAD MADE FINAL DECISION TO PURCHASE FRENCH AIRBUS AND THAT THIS DECISION HAD ALREADY BEEN COMMUNICATED TO FINANCIAL ADVISER TO THE RULER OF ABU DHABI, TAJER, IN LONDON. WE HAVE NO CONFIRMATION OF THIS BUT ARE BEING TOLD BY STEADY STREAM OF PEOPLE THAT THIS IN FACT IS TRUE.

2. ON RELATED MATTER OF MCDONNEL-DOUGLAS ROLE, WELL PLACED BUSINESSMEN GAVE US FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF EVENTS WHICH LED TO DEPORTATION OF MCDONNEL-DOUGLAS REP FOX. REPORTEDLY, SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES HAD MADE DECISION PURCHASE BOEING PLANES WHEN GOVT CAME UNDER PRESSURE FROM ABU DHABI TO BUY WIDE-BODIED AIRCRAFT. FIRST TWO COMPANIES ON SCENE WITH WIDE-BODY PROPOSALS WERE LOCKHEED AND AERO SPATIEL. IN SUBSEQUENT MONTHS ENTIRE SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMITTED ITSELF TO ONE OR THE OTHER OF THESE PLANES. SOME MEMBERS HAD ALREADY ACCEPTED GRATUITIES AND ALL HAD MADE COMMENTS WITHIN GOVT CIRCLES THAT THEY FAVORED ONE OF THE TWO PLANES. AT THIS POINT OF TIME, MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS ARRIVED ON THE

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SCENE WITH MOST ATTRACTIVE OFFER WHICH PLACED INDIVIDUALS ON

SELECTION COMMITTEE IN VERY EMBARRASSING AND THUS VULNERABLE POSITION. OUR SOURCE REPORTS THAT FROM THIS POINT ON, VARIOUS MEMBERS OF SELECTION COMMITTEE WORKED TO GET MCDONNELL-DOUGLAS OUT OF PICTURE EITHER BY TOO HARSH DEMANDS FOR CONTRACT TERMS OR BY CREATING PERSONAL HARDSHIP ON COMPANY REP. FOR A LONG TIME THEY WERE UNSUCCESSFUL AS REP REPORTEDLY REMAINED METICULOUS IN HIS ACTIONS. FINALLY, OUR SOURCE SAYS, REP WAS GOADED INTO SAYING THINGS ABOUT SYRIA AND SYRIAN OFFICIALS WHICH WERE "JUST THINGS HE SHOULD NOT HAVE SAID."

3. COMMENT: VERBAL ATTACKS ON SYRIA WAS ONE OF THE REASONS OSTENSIBLY GIVEN FOR HIS DEPORTATION. IT IS PRESUMABLY THE EMBARRASSMENT AND DIFFICULT POSITION IN WHICH THE INDIVIDUALS OF THE SELECTION COMMITTEE FOUND THEMSELVES AFTER THE MCDONNELL-DOURLAS OFFER THAT CONTINUES TO LEAD THE SYRIAN GOVT TO REFUSE TO READMIT FOX, AT LEAST NOT UNTIL FINAL DECISION ON PLANE PURCHASE HAS BEEN MADE. WE HAVE NO WAY OF VERIFYING THE ACCOUNT GIVEN ABOVE, BUT WE HAVE HEARD IT FROM SEVERAL SOURCES NOW AND IT SEEMS TO HAVE WIDE CREDIBILITY IN SYRIAN BUSINESS CIRCLES.

SCOTES

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